

MVAA 2020 Annual Report

Serving Those Who Served





SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) was created by executive order in 2013 as the state's central coordinating point for veterans and their families. As part of the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), the MVAA provides support, care, advocacy and service to veterans of all eras. The MVAA is responsible for administration and operation of the Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center, a 24/7/365 call center (1-800-MICH-VET) in partnership with Michigan 211; the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund, which provides short-term emergency relief to eligible veterans; and the state's grant to chartered veterans service organizations and the Michigan Association of County Veterans Counselors.

The MVAA embraces the belief that those who serve our state and nation in the armed forces are considered members for life. This means our commitment to these brave men and women start the day they take their oath, providing them with comprehensive support after their service, ensuring their long-term care needs are met with dignity and their loved ones are supported in their time of need. Our goal is to reach and serve all Michigan veterans, a strategic approach that calls for connecting with underserved veteran populations including women veterans, tribal veterans and incarcerated veterans. Through our "no wrong door" approach, we work to connect veterans to the benefits and resources they earned for their service and to remove the barriers they face in employment, education, health care and quality of life, making Michigan a great place for veterans and their families to call home.

Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency FY20 Expenditures

At the MVAA, we pride ourselves on being good stewards of taxpayer money and transparent in how we spend it. Our state appropriated budget in FY20 was \$6.85 million, of which about \$1.8 million went for agency partnerships, grant opportunities and our executive and budget and data teams. All of these efforts were focused directly on our mission of serving Michigan's veterans and their families. The bulk of the budget — more than \$4.3 million — was spent on veteran customer service, marketing and direct outreach and service provision to veterans. This includes:

- **Customer service** — \$816,961. Our 24/7 Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center (1-800-MICH-VET) handled nearly 17,000 veteran inquiries in FY20, an average of 1,400 a month.
- **Marketing and communications** — \$1,054,819. We continued expanding our statewide message of how the MVAA helps connects veterans to the benefits they earned for their service in FY20. The end result: millions of views of our ads, tens of thousands of visits to our website and a corresponding jump in calls to our 1-800-MICH-VET hotline.
- **Veterans Service Officers** — \$633,815. Our VSOs submitted nearly 1,000 applications for veterans' benefits, realizing nearly \$14 million in recoveries for veterans and their families.
- **Strategic Outreach** — \$1,879,720. Our targeted outreach to veterans and veteran-friendly organizations focused on breaking down the barriers veterans face in education, employment, health care and quality of life. This included launching our Community Outreach and Regional Engagement (CORE) Initiative in FY20, which provides tailored outreach to veterans on a regional basis across the state.

Michigan Veterans Trust Fund FY20 Expenditures

The Michigan Veterans Trust Fund's FY20 expenditures totaled \$1,869,976, of which \$1,030,786 was spent on emergency grants for eligible veterans and their families. The remaining expenditures went toward running the program on the state and county levels, with only 12% going for administrative expenses. In 2019, the Michigan Office of the Auditor General (OAG) lauded the MVTF for achieving a 25% reduction in administrative expenses over the previous two years.



A LOOK BACK AT 2020

In the first full fiscal year of Director Zaneta Adams' tenure, and amidst the challenging backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) made significant gains to reach and serve Michigan's 550,000-plus veterans and their families. Working almost exclusively in the virtual space in fiscal year 2020 (FY20), MVAA staff forged many new partnerships and launched innovative programs that advanced the agency's mission of connecting veterans to the benefits and services they earned for their service. Here are just some of our FY20 accomplishments:

Fourth Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award

MVAA was presented with its fourth Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award in 2020 for its Veteran-Friendly Schools Program. The program formally recognizes and works collaboratively with post-secondary institutions committed to supporting the needs of student veterans and dependents. The award was presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs during the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) winter conference.

24/7/365 Assistance for Veterans and Family Members

Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center (MVRSC) is the first statewide program in the nation to offer 24/7/365 assistance specifically to veterans and family members by partnering with a statewide Michigan 2-1-1 network and local veteran service providers. It's a one-stop program connecting veterans to federal benefits, state programs and local services through a toll-free phone number. The MVRSC handled 16,594 inquiries from veterans in FY20, including 2,121 calls for emergency assistance. In the past three years, the Resource Center has handled over 42,000 cases.

Check on MIVet

COVID-19 proved significantly harder on the fragile and medically vulnerable population, which includes many of our veterans. It was with this thought in mind that in mid-June of 2020 the MVAA stood up a new program on our website, Check on MIVet. This service allows veterans themselves, family members or friends to ask for a "check" to be conducted by MVRSC call-center technicians to the veteran. Over the past four months, we have assisted nearly 100 veterans through the program.



Veterans' Benefits Applications

In 2020, MVAA's five Veteran Service Officers submitted 968 applications for veterans' benefits and, in collaboration with National Veteran Service Organizations (NVS), Michigan submitted 9,979 applications for veterans' benefits. MVAA realized \$13,834,020 in recoveries for Michigan veterans and NVS Michigan realized \$219,547,408 in recoveries for veterans and eligible family members. Through a grant program, NVSs provide over 80,000 hours of direct service provision ensuring Michigan veterans and their family members receive the advice and assistance they need to connect to the full array of benefits.

Veteran Service Organization Work Group

MVAA established the Veteran Service Organization Work Group with representatives from NVSs, county-level Veterans Affairs offices and the National Association of County Veterans Services Officers (NACVSO). The work group explored topics such as a regional veteran service provision model; creating an information sharing network for all Michigan Veteran Service Officers (VSO) and county counselors; options and opportunities to get newly hired VSOs accredited quickly; and creating a 2-3-day training focusing on process improvement and VBA hot topics.

▲ In February, Michigan partnered with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to become a Hidden Heroes State and commit to increasing support of veteran caregivers. From left, the MVAA's Fred Schaible and caregivers Chris Sikes, Teresa Sikes and Stephanie Hall join with MVAA Director Zaneta Adams and Ryan Engle of the MVAA to recognize the initiative.

MVAA Certified Veteran-Friendly Employers

Increased the number of MVAA Certified Veteran-Friendly Employers to 391, an 18% increase over FY19.

Outreach to Post-9/11 Veterans

The MVAA partnered with University of Michigan Medicine's Military Support Programs and Networks (M-SPAN) to conduct joint mailers. Through the partnership, the two groups were able to provide outreach and share awareness of MVAA resources, as well as M-SPAN's Homefront Strong Program, ultimately reaching over 10,000 post-9/11 veterans with resource and program information.

MVAA Hosts 13 Listening Sessions

In a first for the MVAA, Director Zaneta Adams traveled throughout the state and hosted 13 listening sessions. These sessions afforded veterans the opportunity to have their voices heard and get questions answered on topics such as state tuition assistance and eligibility for federal health and compensation benefits.

Advertising Campaign for Michigan's Vietnam War Veterans

MVAA's TV, radio and digital advertisements focusing directly on Michigan's Vietnam War veterans were viewed millions of times from March through August of FY20, resulting in about 30,000 clicks to our website, MichiganVeterans.com, and a corresponding jump in calls to our Veteran Resource Service Center.

FY20 County Veteran Service Fund (CVSF) Grant

The FY20 County Veteran Service Fund (CVSF) Grant was awarded to 59 Michigan counties with an additional eight counties able to participate in the CVSF-ER (Emergency Relief) initiative. Total grant requests exceeded \$5.4 million with counties requesting \$1.65 million in emergency relief through amendments to reallocate funds after the Michigan State of Emergency was declared.

Grant-funded Voucher Program

MVAA worked closely with Meijer Inc. to stand up a grant-funded voucher program to allow veterans and their families to purchase food, personal care and cleaning items during the pandemic. \$300,000 in Meijer vouchers were distributed to 28 counties, and redemptions of issued vouchers totaled \$211,475 in just four months.

Grant Supports Remote Operation of Veteran Services

In addition to emergency relief, the FY20 CVSF Grant funded office supplies, infrastructure and technology upgrades for 43 counties. The technology upgrades allowed remote operation of veteran services during the pandemic shutdown. Advertising and marketing initiatives kept veterans informed while staffing and training paid for with grant funds offered Michigan veterans the best service and support possible, in turn, supporting the grant's ultimate goal of connecting veterans and families to their earned federal benefits.

MVAA Launches Community Outreach and Regional Engagement (CORE) Initiative

Aiming to connect more Michigan veterans to the benefits they earned for their service, the MVAA has partnered with several federal and state organizations and veterans' groups to launch our Community Outreach and Regional Engagement (CORE) Initiative. This first-of-its-kind veteran outreach initiative establishes teams of veteran benefits experts and advocates in 10 regions covering the state.

Each team is coordinated by a Senior Veteran Community Engagement Officer (SVCEO) to provide education and support to those working directly with veterans, including the VCATs and Veteran Navigators. Each team also has at least one Veteran Community Engagement Officer (VCEO). The VCEOs conduct outreach, community engagement and marketing on veteran benefits and assistance available through the agency's Veteran Resource Service Center.

The VCEOs also fulfill our executive requirement to establish and maintain a Veterans Speakers Bureau. Another component of the regional teams is the Buddy-to-Buddy Veteran Mentorship Initiative. Each team has a Buddy Coordinator as well as the volunteer "Buddies" who mentor and support veterans on their specific needs.

Finally, through the VBA's Veteran Readiness and Employment program, MVAA will train qualified veterans to serve as interns to support CORE. In the last two months of the fiscal year, the CORE Initiative engaged with 453 veterans, service members and/or family members across the state.

THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

Moving into the next 12 months, MVAA will prioritize service to Michigan veterans by focusing on:

- Connecting with veterans and family members by lining veterans up to earned benefits.
- Veteran suicide prevention advocacy/policy efforts through the Governors Challenge and the Suicide Prevention Commission.
- The She is A Veteran campaign, which highlights a diverse group of women veterans across Michigan and the issues they face while serving and transitioning from the military.
- Working to strengthen relationships with education counselors, other State of Michigan agencies focusing on veteran needs, key transition points for service members leaving active duty and DMVA leadership to provide support to those serving in the Michigan National Guard.
- Continue our targeted outreach through CORE while striving to increase federal funding coming to Michigan in support of our state's veterans.
- Maintaining a "Top 5 Report" showing the most veteran-requested services. This information, which is shared with other state and local agencies, helps identify gaps that we assist to help fill at the local level. The Top 5 veteran-requested services for FY20 were VA Benefits, CVSF-ER (Food Assistance), Utilities, Home Repairs and Rent.

Behind the scenes of the She is A Veteran campaign. Vietnam-era veteran Theresa Robinson shares her story.



THE LATEST VETERAN DATA

Michigan's Veteran Population (from GDX 2020*)

552,412 veterans | Ranked **11** of 53 in veteran population amongst states and territories

83.87% Percent of White Veterans (Not Hispanic or Latino)	10.51% Percent of Black or African American Veterans	3.06% Percent of Hispanic or Latino Veterans	1.67% Percent of Two or More Races Veterans
0.75% Percent of Asian Veterans	0.67% Percent of American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans	0.37% Percent of Some Other Race Veterans	0.03% Percent of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Veterans

Michigan vs National Veteran Population Demographics (as of 9/30/2017)

Michigan: 8.2% Nationally: 6.6% Percent of Adult Population that are Veterans	Michigan: 5.2% Nationally: 10.78% Percent of Veterans that are Military Retirees
Michigan: 7.31% Nationally: 9.41% Percent of Women Veterans	Michigan: 53.37% Nationally: 47.05% Percent of Veterans Age 65 and Over

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**Information comes from GDX 2020 for total veteran population and uses % of veteran population from VetPop to assume the reasonable amount of veterans by race/ethnicity for FY20.*

VA Average Federal Expenditures Per Veteran in Michigan





FY20 MICHIGAN VETERANS TRUST FUND (MVTF) ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Emergency Grant Program Provides \$1,030,786 in Grant Assistance

The MVTF processed 1,125 Emergency Grant Program (EGP) applications, reviews and appeals in FY20, ultimately approving 782 grants that provided \$1,030,786 in grant assistance to 1,179 veterans and their family members. 71% of the grant applications were approved, a 13% increase over FY19.

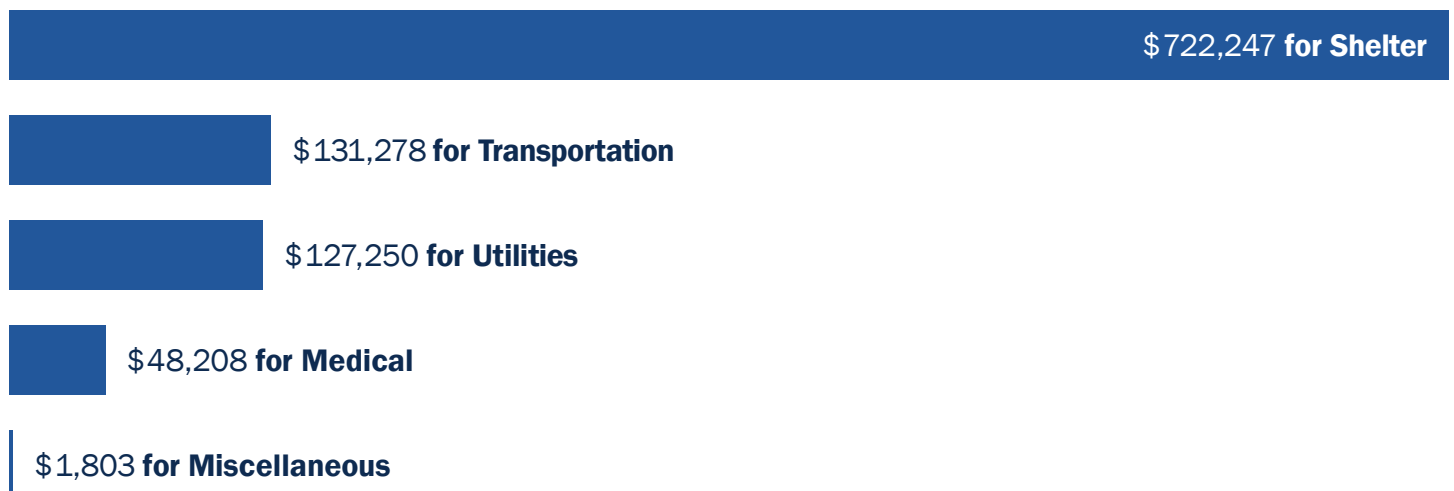
Free Financial Counseling and Debt Management Assistance

The partnership with GreenPath Financial Wellness (established in FY19) continued to provide a dedicated phone line for all Michigan veterans (including peacetime-era veterans) in need of free financial counseling and debt management assistance. After a brief setback due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the progress of this program resumed and more veterans had access, at no cost to them, to trained and certified debt counselors when they needed it most.

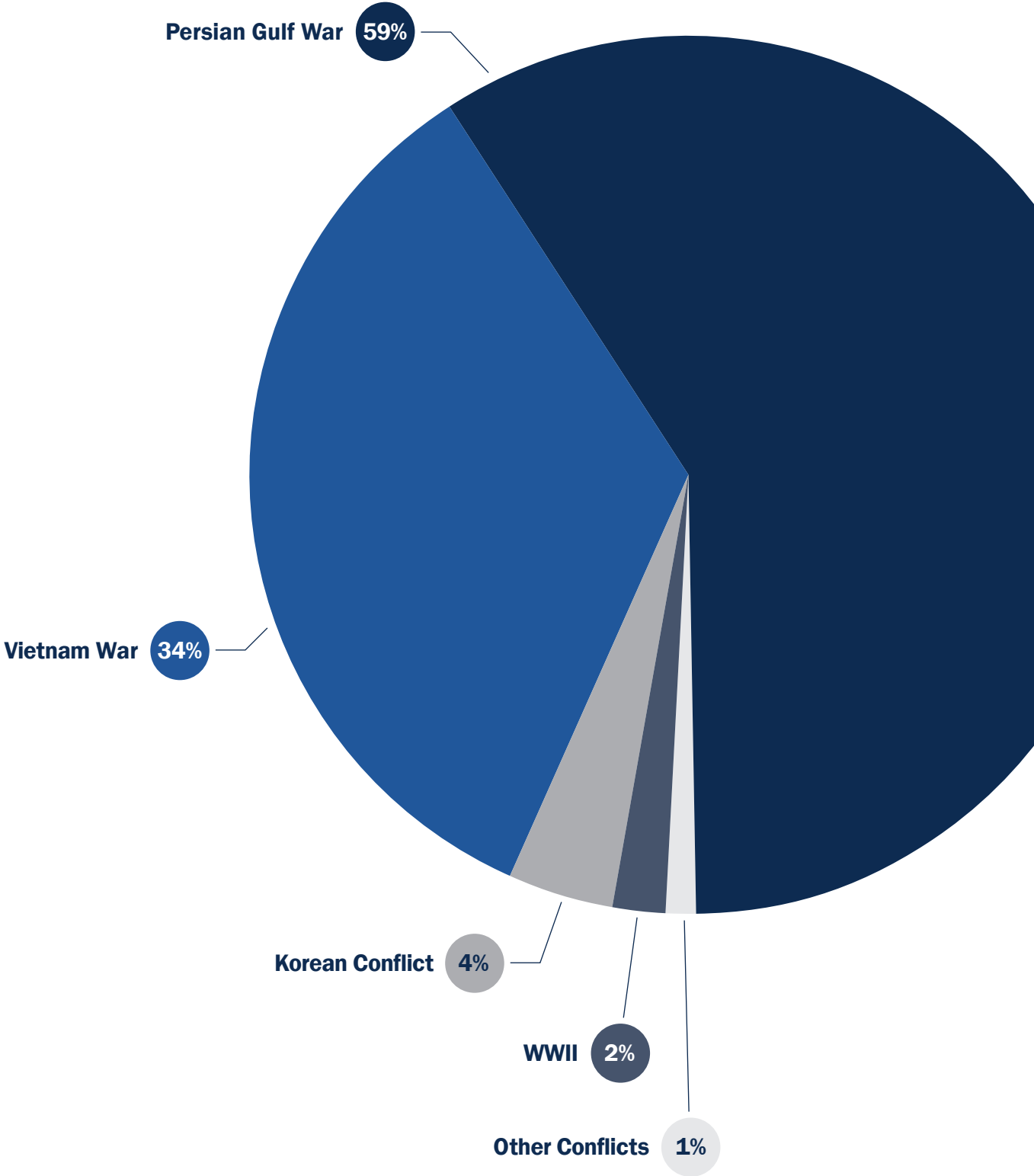
Partnership with Consumers Energy Provides Assistance and Outreach to Low-income Veteran Households

Through our partnership with Consumers Energy, the MVTF had the opportunity to collaborate with Solutions for Energy Efficient Logistics (SEEL) LLC, one of the largest residential direct install programs in the country that delivers residential energy efficiency solutions to low-income households. This partnership is working to reach veterans in areas served by Consumers Energy with information on low- or no-cost energy efficiency upgrades as well as information on emergency assistance available through the MVTF and other resources for veterans that can be accessed through the MVAA's Veterans Resource Service Center.

FY20 Assistance Paid by Category



FY20 Total Apps Submitted by Era





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1-800-MICH-VET
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MichiganVeterans.com